

Danville News Column
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"Where is the Proof of Jesus?"
Friday, December 11, 2009
Word Count: 750

Since the incentive for our annual Christmas fuss and frenzy is this man, Jesus, my daughter's question is timely. "Where's the proof of Jesus?" she asked.

Yes, Penelope, we have evidence of Jesus as an authentic historical figure. Harder is to prove the existence of Mohammad or Moses. Historians count five extra-biblical historical references: Josephus, Babylonian Talmud, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Elder

But do you hear what stirs within her question? The young -- bombarded by opinions, blogs, pundits, bloviators -- seek something to hang their hat onto. Something reliable and authentic about which they can be passionate.

In this maddening world, what is true?

Can we prove Jesus? Even if we could prove, so what?

Might this explain why some tingle over such artifacts as the Shroud of Turin? From an evidentiary basis, it's irrelevant. It's unnecessary. It's a curiosity. Whether authentic or fake, is it going to make much difference in what you believe about the man?

What can and cannot be proved?

This is why I find tepid agnosticism ("I believe in God but who needs organized religion?") and zealous atheism ("I deny God!") both amusing. Although if pushed, I'll take an atheist over an agnostic any day. At least they've committed themselves to something; they believe in something. Agnostics resemble the fellow who goes home with a woman but rushes out so he doesn't have to wake up with her. I heard where 72% favor saying, "Merry Christmas," instead of "Happy Holidays." Glad you feel so strong about Christmas. I'll look forward to seeing you at church on Sunday.

It's very quaint (or very sad) how activist Christopher Hitchens and his disciples, who represent the new breed of

'fundamentalist' atheists, fume over religion when their atheism and rationality is their religion. Everybody has a god they worship. The real question is which one? They're repeating the same silly mistake as did Marxists, in judging Christianity by some of us Christians, mistaking God for an idea of God.

A lazy and banal argument challenges those who are religious to prove the existence of God. But who wants a God who can be proved? Besides (to paraphrase Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis), it takes a believer to accuse God of being a hoax, even scream at God for being an imbecile, a Cosmic sadist. Atheists haven't earned that right.

We tend to get the whole notion backwards, thinking that only when it's proven true will I accept it. There's a dead-end approach to all thinking and doing. That's comparable to saying, "Only when I'm convinced I'm loved, will I love."

Did Jesus exist? We have evidence that the man did. But does that address who Jesus is to those of us who try to authentically celebrate Christmas? This issue isn't the man, but is he lord, messiah? The sacred focus, justification, rationale, and incentive for all these December festivities?

We turn to Scottish common sense moral philosophy, the fertile intellectual soil from which America grew and bore fruit. Scottish philosophy affirms how truths become self-evident. Does it make sense? Truths are experienced as reasonable rather than reasoned to be true. Let's apply that to faith. For example, when I read scripture must it be rational for the story to be believable? Or do I experience its message and then it makes sense? Do I understand to believe? Or believe to understand? What really can be proved? Gravity? Gravity hasn't been proved. But it's a theory that makes plenty of sense. Even though I cannot prove it, I accept it because I observe its obvious consequences. Science proves nothing. Scientists make conclusions on the basis of what they observe. How about the same with religion?

Can we prove the equality of mankind? Or that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights? Can I prove the 'Mona Lisa' is a beautiful painting? Can I prove my love is like a 'red red rose?' Can you prove

you're lonely, contented, or happy? Can you even prove your father, mother, spouse loves you?

Proof? Since when do we live and move and have our being on the basis of proofs? We live and move and have our being on the basis of what we affirm. We publish. We declare. We conclude.

Can I prove Jesus is lord? No. But he sure makes the most sense in this senseless age. And that explains why I celebrate Christmas. Why should I squander energy trying to prove this to you? I'd rather give evidence.